

Research Methodologies in Sport Management

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Introduction

This paper reviewed the ten most popular sport journals in regard to their research design. The publications under review were published between September 2023 and February 2024. Table 1 provides a summary of the methodological approaches used in the respective journals.

Table 1: Summary of Methodological Approaches

Journals	Mixed	Qualitative	Quantitative	Total
Communication & Sport	-	25 (incl. two intros and one editorial)	4	29
European Sport Management Quarterly	2	19 (incl. one intro)	11	32
International Journal of Sport Finance	-	2 (incl. one Intro and one essay)	8	10
International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship	1	7	28	36
International Journal of Sport Communication	1	12 (incl. two industry interviews, one commenatry, one book reviews)	3	16
International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics	2	16 (incl. two reports)	4	22
Journal of Global Sport Management	2	12	10	24
Journal of Sport Economics	-	-	22	22
Journal of Sport Management	-	6 (incl. one lecture)	4	10
Sport Management Review	-	3	3	6

Overall Total	8	102	97	207
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Aligned with what was found in previous reviews, the deployment of qualitative and quantitative research approaches was quite balanced. Nevertheless, qualitative research articles were more prevalent in this Sport Management Digest review, as demonstrated in Figure 1:

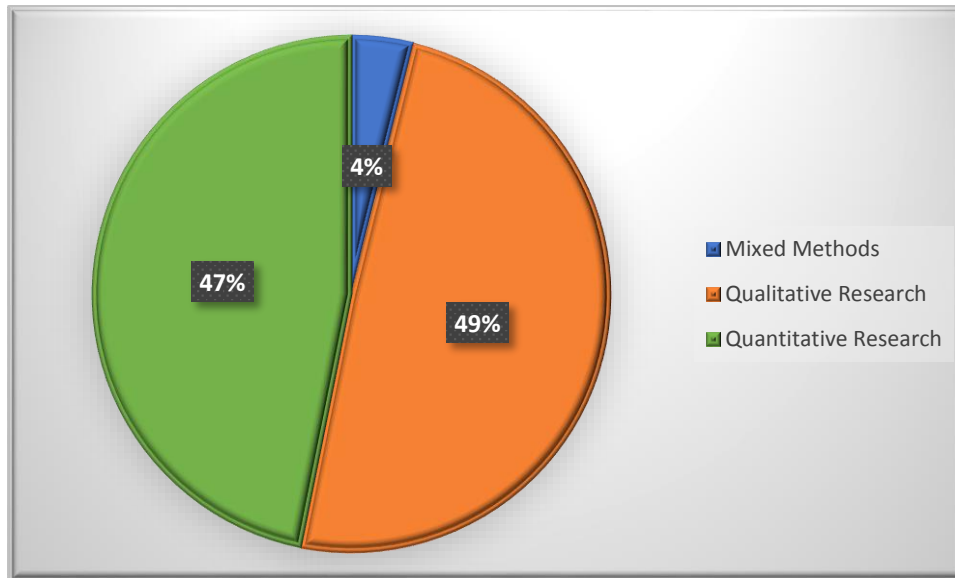


Figure 1: Distribution of Methodological Approaches

Figure 2 demonstrates that the percentage of qualitative research has gradually increased over the past three SMD editions, and is the preferred selected research design.

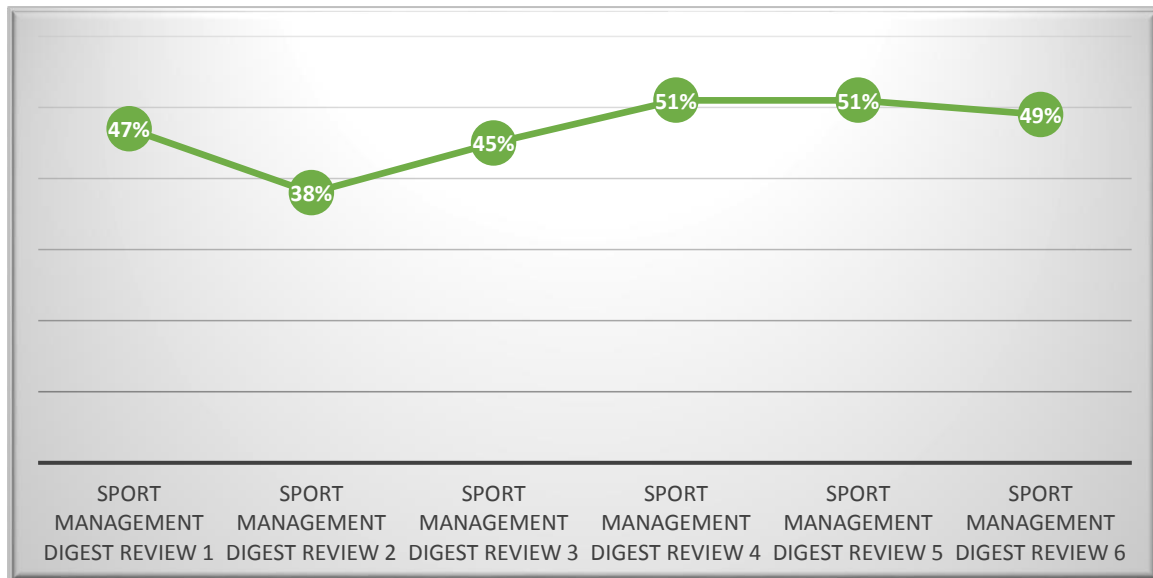


Figure 2: Sport Management Digest Review - Comparison of Qualitative Research (in %)

Similar to the previous reviews, a mixed-method design remains somewhat under-applied, as most researchers commit to either a quantitative or qualitative design. The most prominent methodological approaches in this review are listed in the Table 2 and resemble approaches found in previous Sport Management Digest Reviews:

Table 2: Methodological Approaches

Quantitative Approaches	Qualitative Approaches
Survey	Case Study
Panel Data	(Semi-Structured) Interviews
Experimental Study	Focus Groups
Content Analysis	(Critical) Commentary
Regression Analysis	Thematic Analysis
Structural Equation Modelling/ Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling	Content Analysis
Ordinary Least Squares	Conceptual Review
	Textual Analysis
	(Critical) Discourse Analysis
	Systematic Review

Table 1: Overview of Most Common Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

For this review, five papers were selected for a more detailed presentation. Full details of these papers can be found in the referecne section. In addition, an annotated bibliography of six papers is included at the end of this review to provide more insights into the topics and research designs deployed in the selected journals.

Are They Really Chinese? Examining Chinese Audiences' Emotions and Perceptions Toward Naturalized Athletes at the 2022 Winter Olympics (Li et al., 2024)

There has been an increase in the number of athletes who have changed their nationality to maximize their chances to compete in international competitions due to sport becoming more globalised. To maximize its chances at its home-hosted Winter Olympic Games, the Chinese government authorized many foreign-born athletes to gain Chinese citizenship to compete for China. The authors of this study explored how Chinese social media users perceived foreign-born athletes during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games.

With the popularity of social media, the authors decided to utilise social media content to understand the social identity issues of different groups. According to them, using social media to measure the public has three advantages: directly gathering opinions from users without any framing effects, a wide range of data could be reached, and cost-effective. For this study, the authors collected data from Weibo, a Chinese social media platform and the primary microblogging service in China with 582 million monthly active users. Sentiment analysis was conducted on collected Weibo posts to examine Chinese spectators' emotions towards foreign-born Chinese athletes. Sentiment analysis is commonly used in social studies to identify sentiments, opinions, and emotions about a given subject and/or topic.

The study's findings indicated that Chinese spectators generally had positive emotions toward the Olympians in this study. Online discussions mainly focused on three topics:

expressing their attitudes toward these athletes, questioning the legitimacy of the strategy, and discussing athletes' heritage and cultural identities. The authors claimed that they hoped to broaden readers' understanding of the sport migrant issue in China, the perceptions of foreign-born athletes who take on Chinese citizenship, and the sentiments that Chinese consumers have of these athletes at the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing.

Managing and sustaining cross-sector leveraging partnership in the post-event era: a case study of a provincial parasport collective (Lu & Misener, 2023)

The authors of this study aimed to examine the formation and collaborative dynamics of a cross-sector leveraging partnership group, the Provincial Parasport Collective (PPC), after the event took place. By doing so, they focussed on investigating (1) factors contributing to post-event collaboration, (2) strategies, structures, and leadership mechanisms for the collaboration process, (3) and challenges PPC partners encountered in the post-event era.

In this research, the authors deployed a longitudinal, qualitative case study approach to understand how an event-leveraging collaborative group functions and evolves in the post-event stage. A case study research design seemed promising, as it provides an in-depth investigation of a process occurring in a specific setting. To understand how to sustain strategic cross-sector alliances in a post-event context, unravelling the processes through which partner collaboration unfolds over time is essential. Data related to the PPC were collected from 2016 to 2020. They included various organisational archival documents and eight interviews with representatives of member organisations who contributed to the PPC in the post-event stage.

The authors deployed Gioia et al.'s (2013) holistic inductive approach to generate themes and subthemes on collaborative formation, processes, structures, and perceived challenges for the data analysis. In more detail, the analysis consisted of an

interactive three-step process. During the first step, archival data and interview transcripts were thoroughly read, reviewed, and openly coded to assign appropriate descriptive phrases and/or category labels. During the second step, the authors devoted extensive effort to recursively iterate between descriptive codes generated in the first step and theoretical concepts related to cross-sector collaboration. This step aimed to assess whether the emerging themes convey existing and/or new theoretical concepts that could explain the empirical materials. The last and third steps focussed on identifying broader themes and reducing second-order codes to more aggregated themes.

The study's findings showed that the PPC's ongoing collaboration was shaped by a combination of institutional field, local community, and organisational levels of conditions. The results also revealed challenges during the collaboration process, including group size, lack of cross-pillar communication, and changing momentum over time. With their findings, the authors shed light on cross-sector partnership sustainability and provide practical suggestions about the tactics for supporting ongoing strategic alliances.

The failure to co-host the Seoul 1988 Summer Olympics: a diplomacy “of small steps” influenced by international opinion (1985–88) (Mousset et al., 2023)

Despite diplomatic constraints between South Korea and North Korea in the broader context of the Cold War in the 1980s, a proposal for the potential co-hosting of the 1988 Summer Olympics between Seoul (South Korea) and Pyongyang (North Korea) emerged. As a result, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) organised a series of joint meetings to facilitate North Korean participation in the Games while preventing any action that might undermine the Games' organisation. While the talks ultimately proved to be a failure, they did influence sports diplomacy, as the negotiations showed that there could be compromises to the host city principle enshrined in the IOC Olympic Charter.

The study's analysis was based on 92 articles, allowing the authors to compare the discrepancy between the official discourse and how the same information was relayed and discussed in the international press. Several indicators were utilised to extract text information and select or systematically exclude articles that eventually guided the analysis. The authors selected articles dealing with the elements negotiated in diplomatic discussions (events or sports, the creation of a unified Korean team, ceremonies, cultural programmes and the creation of two organising committees), the rhetorical justifications specific to negotiations (the use of history, peace, unity of the Koreas or between socialist countries, the 'apolitical' nature of sport, etc.) between the different stakeholders (IOC, NOCs of North or South Korea, written press, etc.), and the scope of their discourse (internal and/or external communication to the written press, secret discussions, etc.). The analysis of sources (institutional or print) was based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse, and the content, structure and context of the published sources were used to provide contextual analyses.

The authors concluded that despite the negotiations to co-host the 1988 Summer Games ultimately failing, the exchanges between and positions of the two Koreas show how sport was leveraged as a tool for recognition and political supremacy during the Cold War. The Olympics proved itself an arena for sports diplomacy. However, the political context of overlapping crises between South and North Korea is a reminder that this is only possible if political cooperation already prevails.

Zimbabwe Premier Soccer League in the Context of COVID-19 (Dandah & Chiweshe, 2023)

In this study, the authors examined the emerging impact of COVID-19 on soccer in the Zimbabwe Premier Soccer League (ZPSL). It highlighted how football leagues with historical challenges of funding and a lack of disaster preparedness have been impacted by the pandemic.

The data collection was based on desk research, focusing mainly on newspaper articles and online stories. In total, 40 newspaper articles and online reports were purposively selected between February and July 2020, as during this time, the researchers could understand the dynamics of COVID-19 within the football sector in Zimbabwe. The majority of articles were drawn from major newspapers in Zimbabwe, including the Herald, Chronicle, Newsday, Daily News, Standard, and Sunday Mail. The researchers also adopted some characteristics of netnography research as it involved data collection and analysis in digital contexts. The data was analysed using thematic analysis to explore the emerging narrative around football in COVID-19. According to the authors, thematic analysis was helpful in summarising key features of their large dataset, as it forced them to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organised final narrative.

The data analysis revealed themes related to the negative impact of COVID-19 on local teams, players, and administrators. Another central theme was the responses of football authorities in Zimbabwe to COVID-19. The findings also revealed how COVID-19 entrenched and worsened the already existent economic and political challenges facing football in Zimbabwe, which included poor financial sustainability of clubs, poor administration, corruption, lack of sponsorship, and a general malaise of the sport in the country.

The challenges of harmonising anti-doping policy implementation (Read et al., 2023)

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) directs Olympic anti-doping policy, seeking to harmonise anti-doping policy globally; however, the realisation of consistent implementation among different regions comes with its challenges. The authors of this study aimed to analyse different types of intersignatory variation in anti-doping policy implementation and identify practical solutions to address these imbalances.

The authors deployed a qualitative research design and collected data from the Regional Anti-Doping Programme (RADO). The RADO programme was introduced to

provide training and operational support for developing National Anti-Doping Organisations (NADOs) to ensure that anti-doping policy is correctly implemented and assist NADO members in reaching sustainable self-governance. In total, 22 individuals voluntarily participated in a semi-structured interview: 12 RADO managers, two RADO managers who responded to questions in a translated questionnaire, seven RADO board members, and one board member who completed a translated questionnaire. Sometimes, participants preferred to respond to the questions by writing in their first language rather than participate in an English interview. In these cases, the interview questions were translated, and responses were translated back to English by a bilingual speaker. The selected methodology enabled the authors to collect data on their research question, providing opportunities for additional topics to emerge. Every RADO program was represented, ensuring the sample was heterogeneous and diverse.

Following reflexive thematic analysis, the authors identified four thematic categories explaining inter-signatory variation in anti-doping implementation: (1) socio-geographic, (2) political, (3) organisational, and (4) human resources. Based on the analysis, the authors suggested how potential policy-implementation gaps occur and provided recommendations to improve anti-doping policy implementation.

Annotated Bibliography

- 1. Burdsey, D., Michelini, E., & Agergaard, S. (2023). Beyond Crisis? Institutionalized Mediatization of the Refugee Olympic Team at the 2020 Olympic Games. *Communication & Sport*, 11(6), 1121-1138.**

The authors of this article investigated the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) and the opportunities that arose for refugee athletes. In more detail, they examined the changing intertwinements between broader social dynamics and mediated constructions of refugees. They considered the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) representation of the ROT around the 2020 Games. The authors investigated a catalogue of articles published on the IOC's website by deploying a critical discourse analysis. Their findings indicated four discursive themes: 1. The saving, healing and transformative power of Western sporting capital and the Olympic Games; 2. The ROT epitomises the Global North's inclusivity and benevolence; 3. Refugee athletes as offering hope and inspiration to other refugees; and 4. The neoliberal ideal that "hard work pays off" and "you can overcome everything" in and through sport.

2. **Fujak, H., Ewing, M. T., Newton, J., & Altschwager, T. (2023). Professional athlete responses to new product development: A dialectic. *European sport management quarterly*, 1-22.**

In this article, the authors examined athletes' perceptions of a new sport product innovation, which has significantly impacted their profession. They further explored athletes' demands, opportunities, and tensions arising from this product. The authors highlighted the need to provide athletes with a voice and to put them at the centre of data collection. By doing so, they deployed semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 25 professional male cricketers competing in two of the world's most prominent professional T20 cricket leagues. Interviews were thematically coded to reveal central athlete perspectives, and representative quotes were used to support the analysis. The article highlighted two main findings: First, professional athletes internalised a consumer demand for entertainment from the advent of T20 cricket, resulting in modifications to their frontstage self-presentation. Second, despite the significant financial opportunities that T20 cricket affords, athletes emphasise the intrinsic interpersonal benefits of product innovation. The findings are particularly significant to athlete branding work in that they illustrate how professional athlete self-presentation can be influenced by performative pressures emerging from consumer-driven product innovation.

3. **Armstrong, C. G., Davies, M., Blaszk, M., & Pegoraro, A. (2023). The Kraken Awakens: Exploring the Digital Launch of a New Sport Team Brand During a Global Pandemic. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1(aop), 1-11.**

This article investigated the public's response to the digital brand launch of the Seattle Kraken. The authors utilised agenda-setting theory and content and social media analyses. Through the data collection, the authors identified an initial digital sentiment around the brand and the reach of the virtual conversations. In more detail, the Kraken encouraged favourable conversation about the team by setting the agenda and encouraging consumers to engage with content at specific times during the launch. The article concluded that through agenda setting, Seattle Kraken could effectively launch its new brand while setting the stage for positive brand association development.

4. **Hong, H. J., & Minikin, B. (2023). An international analysis of career assistance programmes for high-performance athletes. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 15(4), 705-724.**

The authors of this study aimed to offer a comprehensive analysis of Career Assistance Programmes (CAPs) available for high-performance athletes across the

globe. With that, they hoped to address the current state of resources for athletes' career development and transitional periods. The authors examined 23 sport organisations spanning five continents, focusing on aspects such as CAPs' accessibility, objectives, content, delivery personnel, practitioner training, and self-evaluation methods. The authors utilised web-based data collection and research tours and employed a deductive content analysis. The results showed resources available to high-performance athletes whilst also identifying service gaps, necessitating policies to support a broader range of athletes. Due to that, the authors advocated for expanding services and ensuring equitable access to resources for athletes at varying performance levels.

5. **Mamo, Y. Z., & Anagnostopoulos, C. (2023). Stakeholders' "voice" through social media: the case of corporate social responsibility in sport. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 24(5), 1002–1020.**

In this article, the authors examined the social outcomes of corporate social responsibility (CSR) by building on social exchange theory and social media analytics. To stress the importance of this research, the authors highlighted that previous (CSR) research mainly revolved around the "usual target" (that is, fans and consumers) that invest money, time and energy in supporting their teams in isolation while largely ignoring individual members of the public. Thus, the authors aimed to incorporate members of the general public into the stakeholder ecosystem by empirically examining their perceptions of sport organisations' CSR activities. For that, they collected historical data from CSR-focused Twitter accounts of six professional leagues (i.e., @nbacares, @nflplay60, @InspireChange, @thewnbp, @Pr_nhl, @Mlsworks and @Mlbsocial) and assessed whether and how the public expresses positive, neutral and negative perceptions. Their findings showed that all CSR-related accounts received more positive tweets about their initiatives than negative ones.

6. **Keaton, A. C. (2023). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of Black women Diversity and Inclusion Leaders in sport organizations. *Journal of Sport Management*, 1(aop), 1-14.**

Athletic Diversity and Inclusion Officers (ADIOs) are novel leadership positions in sport that create and sustain diverse, inclusive, and equitable athletic departments. Interestingly, Black women have assumed many of the Division I ADIO positions. Thus, they seek to lead inclusionary efforts in an organisational field with sustained issues of gender and racial exclusion. The authors of this study applied a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigate what it means to be a Black woman ADIO who leads diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in gendered and racialised Division I collegiate athletic departments. The phenomenological approach put the subject of the study at the centre of data collection, which demonstrated three dominant themes: (a) the ADIO position elicits the Strong Black Woman stereotype, inducing emotional

fatigue; (b) Black women ADIOs are positioned as athletic departments' conscience, often interpreting substantive and symbolic diversity, equity, and inclusion practices; and (c) Black women ADIOs centre their perception of affirmative prescriptions of Black womanhood in an attempt to withstand the adverse realities of ADIO leadership.

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